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Portrait of a community:
Belle Plaine, Iowa, 1895-1925

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by

Stephanie Ann Carpenter

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Department: History
Major: History

Signatures have been redacted for privacy

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INTRODUCTION

In 1862, the community of Belle Plaine, Iowa came into existence. Founded in the first two decades following Iowa's statehood, Belle Plaine is located in southwestern Benton County. For its first sixty-three years of existence, Belle Plaine shared characteristics with other Iowa communities of similar size. At the same time, Belle Plaine exhibited characteristics that set it apart from the majority of Iowa communities. This study will deal with the first sixty-three years of Belle Plaine's history, focusing on the community in 1895 and 1925, particularly in regard to household composition during those years. These data allowed for an examination of the social and economic composition of Belle Plaine, specifically the categories of birthplace, household size, occupation, and religion. Given the focus on two census years, 1895 and 1925, the study will highlight changes that took place in Belle Plaine during this thirty-year interval. Additional sources such as newspapers, secondary studies, and insurance maps allow for a more complete understanding of the community.

The area that would include Iowa and the community of Belle Plaine became part of the continental United States in 1803 when the United States purchased land west of the

Mississippi River from France. The Louisiana Purchase doubled the size of the United States at that time and was officially organized in 1804. Federal officials then attached the portion of the purchase, of which Iowa was part, to the Territory of Michigan in 1805. In 1836, Wisconsin Territory, which then contained Iowa, separated from Michigan Territory. In 1838, Iowa Territory separated from Wisconsin Territory, and in 1846 Iowa became the twenty-ninth state to join the Union.¹

The Louisiana Purchase led to conflict between white settlers and Native Americans who settled along the Mississippi River in the area of Illinois and Iowa. Hostilities escalated, culminating in the Black Hawk Indian War of 1832. A treaty and acquisition of the Black Hawk Purchase in 1832 resulted. These events accomplished three objectives for the United States government. Settlers drove the Indians further west, the land immediately west of the Mississippi River became available for white settlement, and permanent settlement was opened in the region that became Iowa.²

French trappers had traveled and settled along the Mississippi River for many years before the opening of territory for settlement. These trappers had cohabited peacefully with the Native Americans until people from the East began to arrive. The first settlers took up land in the

Black Hawk Purchase, a strip of land about fifty miles wide just west of the Mississippi River. This area had been obtained from the Sauk and Mesquakie Indians as a result of the Black Hawk War. Settlement of the Black Hawk Purchase went quickly.

Displaced sons, families who had not succeeded in the East, and immigrants proceeded west to Iowa during the period from the 1830s through the 1860s. At the time of Iowa's statehood, in 1846, population had surpassed 60,000 people. By the time of the Civil War, more than a third of Iowa had been settled; by 1890, free land was no longer available in Iowa.³

Iowa's early settlers represented a wide variety of people including the New Englander, New Yorker, upland Southerner, Northern European, German, and Bohemian. Most Benton County settlers took up farming, and officials chartered townships with an emphasis on agriculture.⁴ Hyrcanus and John Guinn, from Greenville, Tennessee, established Guinnville in the southwestern corner of Iowa Township in Benton County. Chartered and surveyed in 1856, this early community existed until 1862, when the arrival of the railroad established the community of Belle Plaine.⁵

Arriving in southwestern Benton County, the Cedar Rapids and Missouri River Railway, known today as the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad established the community of Belle

Plaine. Located just north of the community of Guinnville, Belle Plaine quickly overshadowed the older community, incorporating in 1868. Early industry included: a creamery; hardware, lumber, and furniture stores; bookstore; drugstore; music store; dry goods and grocery shops; and mills. In addition, many professionals established offices in Belle Plaine. By 1872, the Citizen and First National Banks had opened. Other businesses present in 1870 Belle Plaine included The Lever and Every Other Daily Union (newspapers), insurance and real estate agents, jewelry stores, hotels, as well as a saloon.⁶

In many respects, Belle Plaine represented a typical nineteenth century community. Many rural communities contained a diverse group of businesses, which offered services to its residents and those living nearby. With an underdeveloped highway system, many rural communities found it necessary to be self-contained while providing services to nearby farmers. The advantage of their self-contained community, and railroad presence provided the residents of Belle Plaine with the means to live, persevere, and survive within the confines of the community.

The community of Belle Plaine, however, did not exist in isolation. The community achieved notoriety for its artesian wells and their treatments during the 1880s. Many people arrived by rail to take advantage of the mineral springs, and

their medicinal treatments. Local citizens established hotels and businesses to benefit from these early tourists. Belle Plaine's artesian wells lost their popularity in 1886 when the routine digging of a well turned into disaster. Widespread flooding and the loss of heavy equipment ended the artesian well business for Belle Plaine.⁷

In the 1890s, Belle Plaine faced another disaster. During that decade the community grew to 3,200 people, and contained a wide array of businesses. The summer of 1894 had been very dry, and by the end of July, fire raged throughout Belle Plaine's business district. Many community businesses sustained substantial losses. The opera house, Shaw & Bowman Department Store, W. H. Burrows, and William P. Hanson each sustained losses over \$15,000.⁸ While the 1895 Sanborn Insurance map recorded loss throughout Belle Plaine's business section, many businesses, however, rebuilt and continued following the fires. The opera house lot, which the 1895 Sanborn map recorded as "ruins of fire," became, by 1925, the site of the community's movie theater.

Belle Plaine was able to rebuild and remain a successful community. Although these natural disasters may have had an effect on Belle Plaine's population, population figures do not support this in the years following the 1890s. In 1895, Belle Plaine's population had reached 3,256 persons, or 106 persons more than the Benton County seat, Vinton. In

comparison, Benton County contained 24,244 persons, the city of Des Moines 56,359 persons, and the state of Iowa 2,058,069 persons in 1895. By 1925, Belle Plaine contained 3,595 persons, a decrease of 5 percent from 1920. Belle Plaine's population in 1925 had fallen to a pre-1915 level. Population for Benton County also followed this pattern, while the state steadily increased its population from nineteenth century levels.⁹

The population of Belle Plaine increased during the first and second decades of twentieth century, at which time the community expanded physically, radiating out from the main business section. The location of the business section has remained constant over time, restricted by the presence of the railroad on its south and west sides and by topography on the east. The population increased to 3,887 persons in 1920. However, by 1925 Belle Plaine's population had decreased to 3,595 persons, and continued to decrease into the 1930s.¹⁰

Residents of Belle Plaine and the surrounding area, like many other Americans, prospered during the first two decades of the twentieth century. This prosperity rested primarily on the success of the American farmer. The years prior to the first World War were good to the American agriculturalist. Living through the "golden age of agriculture," many American farmers enjoyed high prices and

high demand for their crops and products. It was during this "golden age" that many households purchased material goods for the home, farm, or business. However, good times did not continue as agricultural prices plummeted after the first World War.

Belle Plaine residents and those of the surrounding farm communities were not prepared for the economic problems that faced the agricultural sector in the 1920s. The farmer, accustomed to war-level production and the ability to purchase luxury goods, continued to operate at war-time levels. The federal government, in the early 1920s, removed federal price supports for agricultural products. American farmers, unwilling to cut production levels, quickly experienced low prices for their crops, agricultural surplus, and the inability to purchase luxury items. Unable to continue farming, many farmers left their farms and moved to cities and small towns hoping to regain the level of prosperity they had known prior to and during the first World War.¹¹

Iowa, along with most of the Midwest, had been greatly affected by these economic problems. Many left agricultural positions to relocate in cities or towns. Cities increased in population across the Midwest and the United States.¹² Many families left Belle Plaine and the surrounding area during that time. Belle Plaine's population decreased 5

percent between 1920 and 1925. Many Iowa "second class" cities (those with population between two and fifteen thousand people) lost population during this time, "first class" cities (those over fifteen thousand), however, grew. Industrial cities became attractive to displaced farm families. Des Moines, Sioux City, Cedar Rapids, Council Bluffs all registered population increases during the 1920s. The popularity of state colleges and advanced education affected the largest increases in community population. Two smaller cities, Ames and Iowa City, enjoyed the highest increases in the state.¹³

Local newspapers advertised "moving" and "selling-out" sales, for many in Belle Plaine and the surrounding areas. During the 1920s, many farmers sold their property and moved on. Faced with agricultural low prices and mounting expenses, most had no choice but to move. These publicized sales were not, however, an accurate count of the number of families who may have moved during the 1920s. Many more may have moved to a new location, taking with them their entire belongings.

Although the community had been faced with economic recession in the 1920s, Belle Plaine and most of its residents survived into the following decade. In contrast to the grim reality of bankruptcy and recession, Belle Plaine residents partook in many recreational activities. Movies,

lyceum courses, and the annual Chautauqua provided Belle Plaine residents with the diversion needed from daily life. These events, plus the many clubs and organizations present in 1925, gave residents the opportunity to enjoy themselves while in the midst of economic recession.

Community studies are important tools for the social and cultural historian. Community studies allow the historian or sociologist the opportunity to form concrete conclusions about a community during a specific time. The new social history, which encompasses community studies, focuses on the history of the common person and his/her own life, and how that life is influenced by local, regional, and national events.

A study in social history utilizes primary and secondary sources, such as: census records, newspapers, county and municipal records, and maps. These sources enable the historian to discover the routine daily life of the common person. In considering the selection of a community for this study, consideration of available primary and secondary source materials, as well as a community's size and previous written materials, narrowed the list of possible Iowa communities to eight. Discounting the other communities because of size, population, or published materials, led to the selection of Belle Plaine as the focus of this study.

Belle Plaine was chosen for its diverse economic and cultural background; its status as a railroad and Bohemian community aided in the decision.

The major historical source utilized in this study was the State of Iowa's manuscript census. Selection of the census years was more complicated than was first anticipated. Although the federal census would seem to have been a logical source, it was not possible with relation to comparing a turn-of-the-century community and one a generation later. Because the federal manuscript census is held for seventy years before it is made public information, the federal census from 1920 or 1930 was not available for this study. Therefore, it became necessary to consider utilizing the state manuscript census. Conducted every ten years, at mid-decade, the state census did not duplicate the federal census conducted at the beginning of each decade. Concentrating on the turn-of-the-century and the unavailability of the 1905 state census on microfilm, left the option at 1895. With the initial date chosen, it was necessary to choose the follow-up year. Although the 1915 census would have given complete and comprehensive employment and income data, that census was arranged alphabetically by each householders' last name. This arrangement greatly complicated the use of data for a household study. With the possibility of missing Belle Plaine householders because of this organization, it was

necessary to utilize the 1925 state manuscript census.

Both the 1895 and 1925 Iowa manuscript censuses contained data for each householder, such as age, sex, marital status, birthplace, occupation, race, religion, literacy, as well as household size. In addition to the above characteristics, the 1925 census included the value, mortgage, and insurance on each householders' dwelling or rent paid, parents' birthplaces, school grade completed, and the number of years resided in Iowa. The combination of the two census years provide the basis of the study in presenting a view of an Iowa community during the late nineteenth century and first quarter of the twentieth century. Conducting a data collection for each head of household meant 710 cases in 1895 and 914 in 1925.

Data collected, coded, and entered into a database was manipulated using basic statistical methods. Frequencies, means, and percentages were calculated to discover trends, similarities, and differences between samples. (Limitations and errors may exist within the data sample and its codes, depending on the accuracy of the researcher and coder. In this case, myself.) To quantify the collected data, the household sample was compared to the Iowa aggregate census for the state of Iowa, Benton County, and Belle Plaine in 1895 and 1925. Compiled from the manuscript census, the

aggregate census totaled and summarized the data present in the census.

Additional primary sources supplemented the information recorded from the state census. The community's newspapers, Every Other Daily Union, The Lever, and The Belle Plaine Union provided announcements of meetings of associations, clubs, and other organizations, and entertainment programs. The newspapers provided an excellent primary source for a first-hand glance at the day-to-day activities in an Iowa community. They listed the goods and services available in the community, as well as the prices for automobiles, furniture, and groceries. These items allow conclusions to be made concerning the economic and social concerns of Belle Plaine citizens during the thirty-year time span from 1895 to 1925. The Lever and Every Other Daily Union were used in the study of 1895; while The Belle Plaine Union, was utilized for 1925. Advertisements for local shops, organizations, professionals, and even patent medicines present a more complete picture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Belle Plaine.

The city of Belle Plaine also provided primary sources. City Council minutes and resolutions, directories, and the municipal code allowed a look into the operation of city government at the turn-of-the-century and beyond. City Council minutes from 1895 and 1925, revealed important issues

that had been heard by the city council. The meeting minutes allow for a look beyond census data and directories to discover actual problems that existed within the community.

City directories assist the researcher in collaborating the community's newspapers and census lists. The directories verify household size, spouse names, and street addresses. Although the directories had not been published annually, two complete volumes were available. Printed in 1897 and 1923, these two directories assisted in providing comparisons with the census lists and newspapers.

Belle Plaine's Municipal Code, originally printed in 1888, with the reprint in 1918, allowed fines for such crimes as "swearing and cursing," "shooting missiles," and "spitting on the sidewalk."¹⁴ The municipal code, in addition to listing various misdemeanors and subsequent fines, included information concerning licenses, fees, and permits for permanent and traveling businesses and amusements.

Finally, the Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, dated 1895 and 1927, showed the changes over time for Belle Plaine during this thirty-year period. Although addresses were not present on the 1895 census list, it is possible to theorize the possible location of many businesses and homes. On the contrary, the 1925 census provided the home address for each household. Matched against the 1923 city directory it becomes possible to detect a residency pattern within Belle

Plaine.

The following chapters will present the data, results, and conclusions reached using the above material. Chapters II and III will present the data gathered for 1895 and 1925, respectively. Chapter IV provides an analysis of the collected data, comparisons to other Iowa communities and the state in general, as well as conclusions concerning the distinctiveness of Belle Plaine in relation to other Iowa communities. The fourth chapter will address homogeneity and diversity within Iowa, and show how those trends were reflected in one Iowa community--Belle Plaine.

BELLE PLAINE, IOWA:

1895

Residents of Belle Plaine faced many hardships during the last decade of the nineteenth century. As the country suffered from economic panic in 1893, Belle Plaine met another form of devastation in 1894. Experiencing an extremely dry year, Belle Plaine residents combatted numerous small fires during the spring and summer months of 1894. In July, what began as another small fire, quickly became uncontrollable. Fires ravaged the community's business district, destroying homes and businesses within five blocks.¹⁵ Many residents rebuilt their homes and businesses, and while some eventually left Belle Plaine, many more arrived in the community during the early 1890s. This trend was present throughout Iowa in the 1890s; many second class cities experienced increases in population. Belle Plaine's population increased 24 percent from 1890 to 1895.¹⁶ The residents of Belle Plaine demonstrated the ability to survive economic panic and disastrous fires, and still persevere into the twentieth century.

Belle Plaine, a second class city of 3,256 people, consisted of 710 households in 1895. The Iowa aggregate census defined a "second class" city as one with its

population between 2,000 and 15,000 people. Conducting a study of household composition, it was anticipated that householder information would be included on both males and females. Limited information regarding women in the 1895 census hampered this effort. The 1895 census did not record women's employment, voting rights, or literacy rates. However, a woman householder's age, birthplace, household size, and religion was recorded. Due to the absence of employment information on women, it will not be possible to make statistical comparisons between male and female employment in 1895.

In 1895, males headed 91 percent, or 645, households in Belle Plaine, while females headed only sixty-five of the total households. Those householders under the age of forty-two accounted for 50 percent of Belle Plaine's population, with the majority between twenty-five and fifty years of age. The average age, however, in 1895 was forty-four years, and life expectancy approximately forty-seven years of age. The decrease of people over the age of fifty in the population could be explained in several ways. Life expectancy, as well as death from sickness, disease, or lack of proper health care would explain the sharp decrease of the population over fifty years of age. Married householders accounted for 86 percent of the population. With the exception of four divorcees, women householders were routinely widows.¹⁷

Household size was studied instead of family size. This enabled conclusions to be made concerning household relationships as a possible source of a secondary income. In 1895, 55 percent of the households consisted of four or fewer persons.¹⁸ Many households consisted of family members and their kin or relatives, but a few cases existed where the relationships within the household were not defined.

Women headed four households with eight or more persons present; male householders headed fifty-eight of the households with eight or more persons. While many of the larger households were engaged in agriculture, a few were boarding or rooming houses. It is conceivable that the households numbering more than fourteen persons were boarding houses or hotels. Boarders represented primary income for many women householders, or in some cases, secondary income for families. Many women, perhaps unable to find employment away from the home, took in boarders to support themselves and their families. At the same time, taking in boarders allowed women to remain at home to care for their own children. The 1895 census, however, indicated that the larger rooming houses or hotels (numbering more than fourteen inhabitants) were headed by males.¹⁹

By recording each householder's birthplace, an important aspect of this study, allowed comparison between native- and foreign-born householders. Native-born householders in Belle

Plaine accounted for 75 percent, or 520 persons, of the householders in 1895; foreign-born householders numbered 177 persons (see Table 1). Iowans accounted for the largest percentage of native-born householders. Two other midwestern states, Ohio and Illinois, ranked second and third, respectively. Eastern states were also represented. New York, Pennsylvania, and Vermont followed closely behind the top three states.²⁰

Table 1. Householder Birthplaces, 1895

| Birthplace | Percent |
|--------------|---------|
| Native-born | |
| Iowa | 21 |
| Ohio | 13 |
| New York | 10 |
| Illinois | 8 |
| Pennsylvania | 8 |
| Indiana | 3 |
| Vermont | 2 |
| Michigan | 2 |
| Wisconsin | 2 |
| Foreign-born | |
| Bohemia | 10 |
| Germany | 7 |
| Ireland | 3 |
| England | 1 |

Source: Iowa, Census of Iowa, 1895, Manuscript Population Schedules for Belle Plaine, Benton County.

Note: This table does not include all data on householders' birthplaces. Negligible percentages were omitted from the table. Those omitted included: California, Connecticut, Dakota, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

The foreign-born group accounted for 25 percent of the population in 1895. Dominated by a few nationalities, Belle Plaine's largest foreign-born groups included Bohemian, German, and Irish. The Irish, German, and Bohemian groups accounted for 20 percent of the total householder population in 1895.²¹ It is probable that many householders had been drawn to Belle Plaine by the railroad. Hired to work as railroad employees, many may have stayed permanently once they arrived in Belle Plaine.

Of the Bohemian, German, and Irish immigrants, the Irish were the smallest group in Belle Plaine. Many Irish immigrants worked for the railroad as day laborers. An established pattern that began as soon as the Irish arrived in the United States, many Irishmen faced difficulty procuring employment. Although they spoke the English language, Irish immigrants were barred from many positions. Most did not have the financial means to establish themselves in business or farming, thus they became day laborers and railroad employees.²²

German immigrants in Iowa were a diverse group, and those in Belle Plaine exemplified that condition. At least five million German immigrants arrived in the United States between 1820 and 1900. German immigrants to the United States represented many different religious affiliations and socioeconomic groups. Within Belle Plaine, German immigrants

primarily belonged to the Evangelical and Lutheran churches and were employed within agriculture, the railroad, and as laborers. Many were literate and settled near established family and kin.²³

The Bohemians constituted the largest immigrant group among Belle Plaine householders. Representing a distinct area of modern-day Czechoslovakia, Bohemian immigrants began arriving in the United States during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Many conditions within the old country influenced Bohemians to leave Europe. These conditions included agricultural depression, compulsory military service, futile attempts to farm small parcels of land with primitive methods, inheritance laws, and political repression. However, the overwhelming reason for the immigration of Bohemians, and most immigrants in general, was the promise of better economic conditions in the United States.²⁴

The category of "native-born" grouped together all persons born in the United States. However, it is important to separate this group and examine those of African descent. The Iowa aggregate census reported six African-Americans present in Belle Plaine in 1895. However, the household survey collected did not record an African-American householder in 1895. It is probable that these six lived within another's home, either as boarders or guests. The

number of African-Americans in Belle Plaine was consistent with other Iowa communities and the state of Iowa in general as the percentages of this group in Belle Plaine, Benton County, and Iowa remained less than 1 percent well into the twentieth century.²⁵

As well as examining householders' birthplaces, community studies also include the category of occupation (see Table 2). This information allows for assumptions as to the economic viability, as well as the economic diversity, in Belle Plaine during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Common occupations included: merchant, carpenter, laborer, railway employee, as well as a significant part of the population who were retired. Fifty-three of the total 710 Belle Plaine households engaged in farming in 1895. In addition to a general merchant, the town also had merchants of dry goods, hardware, lumber, and farm implements. In total, there were twenty-nine householders listed as merchants in 1895.²⁶

Table 2. Householder Occupations, 1895

| Occupation | Percent |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| Laborer | 19 |
| Railroad employee | |
| Engineer | 4 |
| Laborer | 4 |
| Brakeman | 4 |
| Fireman | 4 |
| Conductor | 2 |
| Switchman | 2 |
| Dispatcher | 0.5 |
| Unknown | 17 ^a |
| Farmer | 8 |
| Business Owners | |
| Merchant | 4 |
| Dry Goods | - |
| Hardware | - |
| Lumber | - |
| Restaurant | 0.5 |
| Farm Implements | - |
| Hotel/Boarding | 1 |
| Confectionery | - |
| Carpenter | 5 |
| Retired | 5 |
| Clerk | 2 |
| Blacksmith | 1 |
| Banker | 1 |
| Doctor | 1 |
| Butcher | 1 |
| Barber | 1 |
| Painter | 1 |
| Shoe Maker | 0.5 |
| Bridge Builder | 0.5 |
| Tailor/Seamstress | 0.5 |
| Dentist | 0.5 |
| Mason | 0.5 |
| Boiler Maker | 0.5 |
| Lawyer | 0.5 |
| Druggist | 0.5 |
| Machinist | 0.5 |
| Contractor | 0.5 |
| Minister | 0.5 |
| Printer | 0.5 |
| Livery | 0.5 |
| Plasterer | 0.5 |
| Salesman | 0.5 |

Table 2. (continued)

| Occupation | Percent |
|----------------------|---------|
| Real Estate Agent | 0.5 |
| Insurance Agent | - |
| Justice of the Peace | - |
| Marshall | - |
| Teacher | - |
| Artist | - |
| Yard master | - |
| Grain Dealer | - |
| Stock Dealer | - |
| Coal Dealer | - |
| Saloon Keeper | - |
| Ice Dealer | - |
| Restaurant help | - |
| Creamery | - |
| Brick Maker | - |
| Gardener | - |
| Silversmith | - |
| Foreman | - |
| Electrician | - |
| Marble Cutter | - |
| Harness Maker | - |
| Cheese Maker | - |
| Movers | - |
| Teamster | - |
| Well Digger | - |
| Laundry | - |
| Thrasher | - |
| Telegrapher | - |
| Broom Maker | - |

Source: Iowa, Census of Iowa, 1895, Manuscript Population Schedules for Belle Plaine, Benton County.

Note: Occupations that included only one or two householders is noted with a "-".

^a The unknown category includes unemployed male householders and all female householders in 1895. The 1895 manuscript census did not record employment for housewives or female householders, thus showing that single women possessed no visible means of support. The omission of this information proves difficult to account for women's contribution to the household's income.

A large number of merchants in Belle Plaine in 1895 was typical of small towns. During the nineteenth century communities found it necessary to provide services for local-area farmers, families, and the business community. Other Iowa communities also included a high number of merchants during the nineteenth century. The influence of the railroad, and its ability to transport cheap goods from the east, caused many small rural communities to become "retail and service centers" for its own residents and surrounding agricultural area.²⁷

In 1895, seven householders were employed as doctors, two as dentists, and four as druggists. Other professionals included lawyers, real estate/insurance agents, justices of the peace, printers/publishers, and a teacher. Belle Plaine employed one householder as a marshall.²⁸ This level of service was consistent with other communities during the late nineteenth century. Thomas Morain in Prairie Grass Roots: An Iowan Small Town in the early Twentieth Century examined the community of Jefferson, Iowa. Jefferson contained many of the same services, present in Belle Plaine, for its own residents during the 1890s. In the late 1880s and 1890s Jefferson had expanded into a retail and service center that included doctors, dentists, and lawyers; as well as banks, restaurants, meat markets, groceries, and clothing and shoe shops; the community also contained a creamery, saloon, and

bookstore.²⁹

The railroad employed 136 householders in 1895; with many persons working as engineers, brakemen, firemen, conductors, switchmen, dispatchers, and laborers. With approximately 20 percent of Belle Plaine's householders employed by the railroad it seemed reasonable that Belle Plaine provided services for these employees, as well as for the surrounding farming community. The economy of Belle Plaine, as with other rural communities, remained self-contained in the 1890s. It was not necessary to hire someone from another community for manual labor. Day laborers numbered 136 householders in 1895 and were employed by businesses and farms in or around Belle Plaine. Besides laborers and carpenters, Belle Plaine's male householders found employment as bridge builders, blacksmiths, painters, plasterers, gardeners, electricians, machinists, thrashers, masons, telegraphers, and livery men. In addition, one male householder was employed in each of the following occupations: silversmith, marble cutter, cheese maker, broom maker, and well digger. These positions clearly emphasize the diversity of occupations contained within a rural Iowa community during the late nineteenth century.³⁰

Although the aggregate census reported five milliners in Belle Plaine in 1895, no householder, male or female, reported such employment in the 1895 manuscript census. It

is highly probably that women would have been involved in this occupation. Mainly a women's occupation, millinery supported many women and their families. Most communities in central Iowa, during the late nineteenth century, contained at least one milliner, and in many cases communities supported three or four milliners.³¹

Millinery was the third most popular employment, behind household servants and teachers, for central Iowa women in 1870 and 1880. Communities supported numerous milliners due to the nature of the profession. Customers preferred the "one of a kind" hat that a local milliner produced. On the other hand, mail-order catalogs and stores carried a ready-made product that anyone could purchase. Milliners were able to provide their customers with an unique, stylish hat that could be refurbished later if they desired.³²

A third category defining Belle Plaine's householders is religion. The religious preferences of local residents in 1895, although diverse, was consistent with existing trends across the Middle West. The majority of the residents in Belle Plaine in 1895 belonged to a Protestant religion, as did most settlers of the Middle West. Immigrants of Northern European heritage, specifically German, Scandinavian, and English belonged to a Protestant church. They established Methodist, Lutheran, Congregational, and Evangelical

churches. One major immigrant group, however, the Bohemians, belonged to the Catholic Church. The Bohemians, along, with the Irish, some Germans, and native-born householders made-up the Catholic population of Belle Plaine (see Table 3).

Iowa during this time faced much legislation concerning the issue of prohibition. In 1882, Iowans passed an amendment to the state constitution prohibiting the sale and use of alcoholic beverages. However, by 1894, that amendment had been repealed and local option had been installed. It is probably within this context that forty-three householders were labeled as "Drunkard," "Infidel," or simply "None" with regard to religion. Of these forty-three men, the majority worked for the railroad. Others included the local saloon owner.³³

Table 3. Householder Religions, 1895

| Religion | Percent |
|------------------------|---------|
| Methodist Episcopalian | 37 |
| Congregational | 16 |
| Catholic | 12 |
| Evangelical | 10 |
| Baptist | 6 |
| Lutheran | 5 |
| Christian | 4 |
| Protestant | 0.7 |
| Unknown/No religion | 6 |

Source: Iowa, Census of Iowa, 1895, Manuscript Population Schedules for Belle Plaine, Benton County.

Literacy, also recorded on the census, showed that not one householder indicated that he or she could not read. For most of the women householders this category was not completed so it is difficult to determine the total level of literacy within the community. However, in the case of the male householders, it is plausible that a few may have been illiterate. Unfortunately, those few did not respond in that fashion for the census. There may be many reasons for this, the least being shame and guilt for not possessing the ability to read or write.³⁴

In summary, census data indicated that by 1895, Belle Plaine had become a growing community, with an ever expanding number of businesses and occupations. Although the community contained a sizeable number of foreign-born, most were Iowa-born. While many occupations were listed on the census, railroading predominated, providing residents with cheaper goods and services. To explore these advances it is necessary to review other sources of history.

Census data accounted for only a portion of the information gathered for this study; newspapers, maps, city council minutes, and city directories provided supplemental information. The Lever and Every Other Daily Union advertised washing machines, sewing machines, steam and tank heaters, as well as patent medicines and various goods and

services of the period. Merchants advertised their sales and specials. In addition, the newspapers carried columns for the woman and housewife, including: recipes, stories, and health information.

Approximately half of the twenty-nine merchants in Belle Plaine in 1895 advertised in local papers. Many of the merchants sold clothing, groceries, insurance, jewelry, lumber, pianos, real estate, and other services advertised in The Lever and the Every Other Daily Union. While the census data recorded a householder only as a "merchant," newspaper advertisements specified the goods that he sold as well as the price of the items. Subscription rates for the New York Tribune appeared in The Lever. Many local merchants advertised their sales in the newspapers, including Jennings Department Store:

| | | |
|---------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| Ladies' | Black Stockings | \$.06/pair |
| | Gloves | \$.06/pair |
| | Shoes | \$1.20/pair |
| Mens' | Shoes | \$1.40/pair |
| | | \$1.50/pair ³⁵ |

Advertisements in the 1895 newspaper indicate that the economy of Belle Plaine, and Iowa in general, had been impacted by the railroad and its ability to transport cheaper goods from the Eastern United States. Clothing and shoe shops, as well as larger department stores could afford to

carry ready-made clothing for its customers. The presence of tailors and shoe makers indicate that many in Belle Plaine still preferred to wear custom-made clothing and shoes in 1895.

While craftsmen had not disappeared completely, as they would by 1925, they did feel the effects of the railroad on business. While sales histories are not available, it is conceivable that many craftsmen would have followed a similar pattern to other craftsmen around the state. Thomas Morain found, in his study of Jefferson, Iowa, that with the arrival of the railroad and the twentieth century, craftsmen found it necessary to include repair work and retail sales with their manufacturing.³⁶

The Lever also published advertisements for the only brickyard in Belle Plaine. Owned by R. F. Smith, the brick sold for seven dollars per one thousand in 1895. Census data verified that Belle Plaine had only one householder manufacturing brick in 1895. Although Smith may have employed many men, he was the only householder actively engaged in this trade. Other businesses advertised in the newspaper as well. Again, the census provided the means for collaboration. These businesses included Belle Plaine's hardware and drug stores. Sales, as well as a general advertisement concerning the store and its location appeared in most issues of the newspaper.

Advertisements for various patent medicines, such as Hair Balsam, McElrees' Wine of Cardui, Quinn's Ointment, and Sarsaparilla were found in each issue of The Lever and Every Other Daily Union. Although Belle Plaine contained seven doctors in 1895, many Belle Plaine residents preferred to use patent medicines. In this manner these residents followed a trend that dominated the country. In his study of Midwestern communities, Lewis Atherton wrote that patent medicine companies spent "enormous sums" on advertising. Newspapers everywhere carried paid testimonials as to the great effectiveness of such medicines. Many favorite brands were carried by local druggists. These patent medicines had a high content of alcohol which made them doubly popular, especially during times of prohibition.³⁷

Many small town newspapers, in addition to publishing advertisements, gave community residents a look at the world outside of their town, county, or region; The Lever fulfilled this concept by providing the Belle Plaine residents with an abundance of information and news. In addition to patent medicines, which took up only a fraction of space, and advertisements, newspapers left space for literary stories, world news, and stories of the unusual. In addition, The Lever published announcements concerning marriages, births, deaths, real estate sales, election candidates, and meetings. The Lever appeared to represent more of the character of

Belle Plaine by reporting on local events and businesses.

Belle Plaine's other newspaper, The Every Other Daily Union, began publication on July 17, 1897. The Every Other Daily Union is relevant to be included within this chapter as it presented a different emphasis from The Lever. In addition to the information found in The Lever, The Every Other Daily Union published recipes, weather forecasts, editorial cartoons, architectural plans, agricultural hints, and a woman's column. Although published by a man, The Every Other Daily Union carried many items for housewives. The newspaper also published announcements of Belle Plaine's associations, clubs, and organizations. In 1897, the paper asserted that Belle Plaine contained fifty-eight secret organizations. Additionally, churches published their announcements and prayer schedules in the Every Other Daily Union.³⁸

Although a survey of householders and a study of the community's newspapers does not present the complete picture of a community, they do represent necessary beginnings of a community study. In addition to the census and Belle Plaine newspapers, the municipal government's council minutes assist in establishing a more complete picture of Belle Plaine in 1895. Responsible for enforcing Belle Plaine's rules, laws, and regulations, the City Council met every two weeks.

City council minutes offer a glimpse into the issues and

concerns of a rural community in the late nineteenth century. Meeting every two weeks, the City Council first met in 1895 on January 8. The mayor, six councilmen, and the clerk attended the first meeting of the year. The Council included local businessmen, including clothier Solly Wertheim and publisher Fred W. Browne, mayor and clerk, respectively. The six councilmen represented various facets of community life, including railroad engineers and a grocer.

Various motions came before the City Council in 1895. In March 1895, the elections for some city officials occurred. In addition to the mayor and various ward aldermen, the election included the positions of assessor, solicitor, and treasurer. During the same month, salaries for various officials were addressed and resolved.³⁹ Committees were also established to handle specific situations. It is obvious that even in 1895 Belle Plaine held certain community services in high regard. The community established the following committees in 1895:

| | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Buildings and sewage | Law and order |
| Finance | Sidewalks |
| Fire, water, and lights | Streets and alleys ⁴⁰ |

These committees assisted the mayor in administering city ordinances. Motions appeared concerning the condition of the community, in regard to sidewalks, street lights, and water nuisances. In other communities, residents, mainly

women, began to demand paved and cleaned streets during the 1890s. Sanitary ordinances had become common following the American Civil War. Women lobbied for drinking fountains, public litter baskets, and garbage collection in most communities following the Civil War and into the twentieth century.⁴¹

Not unique to Belle Plaine, other Iowa communities also established municipal services in the late nineteenth century. Boone, Iowa City, and Marshalltown were the focus of Maureen Ogle's article, "Redefining Public Water Supplies, 1870-1890: A Study of Three Iowa Cities," which dealt with municipal services. Newspaper editors in those communities pushed for, and the community eventually received, public water and sewage systems in the 1860s and 1870s.⁴² Belle Plaine's municipal services were well developed by 1895. Public water and sewage systems benefitted communities in many ways. Waterworks and sewers were cleaner and more efficient; they prevented the spread of cholera and other diseases, as well as aiding in fire fighting and rescue.⁴³

This chapter has presented a preliminary look into the community of Belle Plaine during the nineteenth century. The data presented here allow generalizations to be made concerning that community. Belle Plaine in 1895, consisted of a majority of male and native-born householders. Mostly

married with an average age of forty-four, these householders practiced Protestantism, engaged in skilled and semi-skilled jobs, and had been born in the Middle West, New York, or Pennsylvania. Real changes within Belle Plaine will not be evident until comparison is made to the 1925 census and conditions existing within the community at that time.

BELLE PLAINE, IOWA:

1925

The twentieth century began with renewed hope for many residents of Belle Plaine and the state of Iowa. Following a period of economic and natural disasters, the early twentieth century brought prosperity to Belle Plaine. The years prior to the first World War became known as the "golden age of agriculture." These years benefitted the American agriculturalist. During this "golden age" many households purchased material goods for the home, farm, or business. Most expected these economic conditions to continue after World War I and into the next decade. However, these conditions did not persist and many Midwestern and Iowa farmers found themselves in severe economic trouble during the 1920s.

Belle Plaine residents experienced a pattern of boom and bust similar to that experienced by other Iowans during the early twentieth century. Between 1900 and 1920, the community flourished as new businesses and families arrived there. Working persons purchased many new and necessary items for the home, farm or business at a level unseen previously. Many purchased automobiles for the first time during this "golden age." State officials reported that

farmers purchased one-half of all new automobiles in 1910.⁴⁴

Belle Plaine's population increased dramatically between 1910 and 1920. After 1920, however, a severe agricultural recession replaced prosperity. The agricultural recession continued until the 1930s, at which time the whole country experienced economic depression. The Belle Plaine Union publicized many moving and selling-out sales and auctions during 1925. Because families who left Belle Plaine during this time had the advantage of automobiles and improved road conditions, it had become easier to leave a community if one had not succeeded.

Although the population had decreased from 1920, Belle Plaine, in 1925, contained 914 households, an increase of 30 percent over 1895. This increase represented a society that changed during the thirty years of this study. Although the census data did not always illustrate a change during the thirty years of this study, changes had occurred. Upon first glance many 1925 characteristics appear similar to those in 1895, but differences became apparent later. Beginning with the category of sex, Belle Plaine's heads of households in 1925, were 89 percent male. Married householders accounted for 83 percent of the sample. The average age of Belle Plaine's householders in 1925 was forty-nine years of age.⁴⁵

While the householders' average age has been calculated to be forty-nine years of age, householders' ages ranged from

twenty-one to ninety years in 1925. Most householders, however, fell between thirty and sixty years of age, with the majority under forty-eight years of age. The average age for 1925 is higher than thirty years previous (forty-four years in 1895) and it is possible that the first World War and declining birth rate had an effect on the population of Belle Plaine. Younger men would have gone to fight in World War I, thus leaving at home the older men and parents of community residents. Another possibility is that young men left home after school, hoping to succeed in a larger community than Belle Plaine. Householders ranging in age from twenty to thirty accounted for 21 percent in 1895 and only 10 percent in 1925. In essence, Belle Plaine's population appeared to have shifted toward the older generation as early as the beginning of the twentieth century. This is understandable because as Belle Plaine lost population, larger communities, such as Cedar Rapids, Council Bluffs, Des Moines, and Ottumwa gained population after 1920.⁴⁶

In 1925, the Iowa aggregate census again reported the presence of African-Americans in Belle Plaine. In contrast to 1895, the 1925 household survey revealed at least one African-American family within the city. However, by the end of the decade, it is possible that many African-American families may have moved to Belle Plaine. The Census for Iowa, for the year 1925 recorded a total of seven African-

Americans residing in Belle Plaine and Benton County in 1924. Belle Plaine reflected a trend that existed at the state level as well. Prior to 1950, the number of African-Americans in Iowa accounted for less than 1 percent of the population. The figures for Belle Plaine reflect that fact.⁴⁷

An explanation for the increase in African-Americans in Belle Plaine is the creation of Buxton, a largely black coal mining community in Monroe County. The Chicago and Northwestern Railroad built a spur line from Belle Plaine to Buxton in 1900 and then shipped its coal on that line to other points in Iowa. This railroad line provided a transportation route for Buxton residents, many of whom left the community between 1923 and 1925. Belle Plaine may then have provided a stopping off place for some of these individuals.⁴⁸

Along with householders' ages, the size of households is also significant. Ranging from single person households, to households with thirteen persons, Belle Plaine in 1925 possessed smaller householders than those of the nineteenth century. Four-person households constituted the average in 1925.⁴⁹ As a traditional family, that included two parents and two children; however, many households were not considered traditional. Many included a boarder, relative, or servant.

Other household characteristics are also important to a community study. By studying the birthplaces of each householder, conclusions may be drawn comparing Belle Plaine to the rest of Iowa. Prior to 1925, native-born householders arrived in Belle Plaine from other Middle Western states, New York, and Pennsylvania. However, in 1925, native-born householders arrived from more states than those present in 1895, including Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Montana, Texas, Utah, and Washington. Native-born householders accounted for 85 percent of the population; foreign-born householders made up the remainder. The majority of foreign-born householders in 1925 were again from Bohemia, Germany, and Ireland. The 1925 census, however, included some European countries not present in 1895. These included a few householders from Greece, Hungary, and Poland (see Table 4).⁵⁰

The presence of eastern Europeans in Belle Plaine during the early twentieth century represented a pattern similar throughout the state. According to the federal census, the number of most eastern Europeans was low before 1910. In 1900, for example, the state contained only 18 individuals born in Greece. By contrast, the federal census of 1910 recorded 3,356 Greek-born individuals residing in Iowa. By 1920, the number of Greeks had dropped to 2,884 and ten years later to 1,910. Polish-born individuals reflect somewhat the

same pattern. In 1900, Iowa contained 751 person born in Poland; by 1910, that number had jumped to 2,115. Again, like the Greeks, the number of Poles in Iowa declined after 1910.⁵¹ It is probable that between 1910 and 1920, Belle Plaine contained a even greater number of eastern Europeans than in 1925.

Table 4. Householder Birthplaces, 1925

| Birthplace | Percent Householder | Percent Father | Percent Mother |
|---------------|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Iowa | 59 | 13 | 18 |
| Illinois | 6 | 4 | 4 |
| Ohio | 4 | 10 | 10 |
| New York | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| Pennsylvania | 2 | 7 | 7 |
| Unknown | - | 10 | 10 |
| Bohemia/Czech | 5 | 12 | 11 |
| Germany | 5 | 11 | 11 |
| Ireland | 1 | 5 | 4 |

Source: Iowa, Census of Iowa, 1925, Manuscript Population Schedules for Belle Plaine, Benton County.

In addition to each householder's birthplace, the 1925 census recorded the birthplaces of the individual's parents (see Table 4). This allowed the opportunity to discover how many householders had been born in a state different from Iowa, or how many were children of immigrants. While 59 percent of the total population of householders had born in Iowa, only 13 percent of their fathers and 18 percent of

their mothers had been born in the state. Examination of parents' birthplaces indicated a high occurrence of parents born in Tennessee and Kentucky. Of the total householder population, 36 percent of their fathers had been immigrants. Among the householders' parents, a higher incidence of mothers born in Iowa had occurred.⁵² This could represent many possibilities, mainly that male householders may have moved to Iowa as single individuals, and then married a local woman.

In addition to a householder's birthplace and religion, his or her occupation is equally important in a study of this scope. In 1925, the Iowa manuscript census no longer recorded individual occupations. That year individual occupations became occupational categories: Agricultural, Domestic Service, Laborer, Manufacturing, Professional, and Trade and Transportation (see Table 5). Of these categories, 30 percent of householders had employment within the Trade and Transportation category. Labor and Manufacturing followed behind the top category. Agriculture, Professional, and Domestic Service commanded 21 percent of the householders combined.⁵³ Comparison of occupations to the 1923 city directory allowed a conclusion to be made concerning those that did not list employment in 1925. Many householders whose occupations were not recorded were listed as retired in the city directory.

Table 5. Householder Occupations, 1925

| Occupation | Percent |
|----------------------|---------|
| Trade/Transportation | 30 |
| Labor | 21 |
| Manufacture | 15 |
| Unknown/Retired | 12 |
| Agriculture | 8 |
| Domestic | 7 |
| Profession | 6 |

Source: Iowa, Census of Iowa, 1925, Manuscript
Population Schedules for Belle Plaine, Benton County.

Although the census did not provide each householders' actual occupation, by utilizing the 1923 city directory it was possible to record most householders' individual occupations. The city directory indicated that craftsmen had almost disappeared from Belle Plaine by the 1920s. In 1923 not one householder recorded his or her occupation as cheese maker, silversmith, harness maker, marble cutter, broom maker, wagon or cabinet maker, all occupations that had been present in 1895.

The category, Domestic Service, accounted for the occupation of most women householders in 1925. While some women may have been employed as domestic servants, housewives as well as female householders were placed within this category. The manuscript census indicated that 10 percent of the women householders worked in an occupation other than domestic service. These women found employment within

agricultural, professional, trade and transportation, and labor fields.⁵⁴

While it was not possible to determine precisely each woman's actual occupation, it is possible to draw conclusions concerning women's employment in the 1920s. Women might have worked for a few years before their marriage, and would have entered the work force later only if their financial situation warranted it. In 1925, female householders might have worked in a wide range of occupations, including: teacher/principal, store or business clerk, milliner, seamstress, and as recorded in Jefferson, doctor.⁵⁵

The census, in addition to occupational data, asked each person in the work force questions concerning lost wages due to communicable diseases, and months unemployed due to lay-offs or lack of work. Many people who reported lost wages due to communicable diseases, worked for the railroad and in skilled labor positions. However, many more spent time out of work due to lack of work or lay-offs, in which case their lost income was not reported. In total, 180 householders, 20 percent of the householders, reported being out of work for a portion of or all of 1924.⁵⁶

By utilizing the figures from lost wages, it is possible to arrive at an average wage for many occupations in 1924. Of those working for the railroad, many including conductor, dispatcher, engine inspector, engineer, fireman, lever man,

signal man, and switchman received more than \$100 per month. Railway laborers and brakeman earned, on average, less than \$100 per month. However, some positions, including that of train examiner, earned \$230 per month.

Other occupations in Belle Plaine paid wages similar to railway wages. Many positions averaged just over \$100 per month, while those householders employed as gardeners, laborers, plumbers, supply man, and teamsters earned less. Again, a few householders earned more than \$200 per month; however, they held positions of management, such as bridge foreman or roundhouse foreman. The following positions averaged wages just over \$100 per month in 1924.

| | |
|------------------|------------|
| barber | cook |
| boilermaker | machinist |
| bridge carpenter | mechanic |
| car dealer | painter |
| car repairer | salesman |
| carpenter | tinner |
| cashier (depot) | undertaker |
| contractor | |

In the area of religion, by 1925, a shift occurred from the more dominant religions of the nineteenth century (see Table 6). While Methodist Episcopalianism, Congregationalism, and Catholicism remained prominent, accounting for 48 percent of the religious preference of the population, the category of "Protestant" alone accounted for 31 percent of the householders religious preference in

1925.⁵⁷ Representing the largest increase between 1895 and 1925, Protestantism increased 30 percent. However, the possibility exists that many denominations may have been placed within this category (Protestant) during the enumeration. The 1925 census also recorded religions not present in 1895, namely Bethany, Free-thinkers, Jewish, and Mennonite.⁵⁸

Table 6. Householder Religions, 1925

| Religion | Percent |
|------------------------|---------|
| Protestant | 31 |
| Methodist Episcopalian | 22 |
| Congregational | 14 |
| Catholic | 12 |
| Evangelical | 7 |
| Lutheran | 5 |
| Baptist | 2 |
| Christian | 2 |
| Presbyterian | 2 |

Source: Iowa, Census of Iowa, 1925, Manuscript Population Schedules for Belle Plaine, Benton County.

In addition to the major characteristics present in 1895 and 1925, the 1925 census reported information concerning each householder's length of time in Iowa and school grade completed. The range for the length of time that an individual had resided in Iowa differed from house-to-house. Ranging from those who had just arrived to those resided in Iowa for 80 years, the average length of time that a householder had lived in Iowa was forty-one years, with 50

percent of the population below forty years.⁵⁹

Regarding the level of schooling that each householder had reached, as well as their literacy, the average grade completed by Belle Plaine householders had been seventh/eighth (7.5) grade. Of 914 householders, only three responded that they could not read or write. With five householders stating that they had not attended school past the second grade, one might expect more people to have answered that they could not read or write. However, pride perhaps kept some householders from revealing that condition.

The 1925 census indicated that the average grade completed by householders who had attended school, had been seven and one-half. Within the state of Iowa, elementary education became compulsory in 1902. The first law called for all children between the ages of eight and fourteen to be enrolled in school for twelve weeks each year. By 1913, the compulsory education law had undergone many changes in its content and structure. Changes included an increased period of enrollment (24 weeks) and mandatory attendance until age sixteen. One exception had been made so that children could leave school at the age of fourteen, provided that they had found employment and had passed the eighth grade.⁶⁰

Iowa school officials recognized that elementary education did not offer complete preparation for entrance into normal or teaching schools. The establishment of urban

high schools succeeded in raising the qualifications of teachers, thus raising the level of education for Iowa's youth. However, it was not until 1900, that lawmakers recognized the need for the establishment of uniform high schools across Iowa.⁶¹ Belle Plaine citizens also recognized this need, as evidenced with the building of the Belle Plaine High School in the twentieth century. One third of the householders in 1925 recorded that they had attended school past the eighth grade.

Home ownership had also been recorded in the 1925 census. The 1925 householder sample, indicated that 74 percent of the householders owned or were in the process of owning their homes.⁶² The average home value in Belle Plaine in 1925 was \$2800, with the majority of homes valued less than \$2500. While the value of homes ranged from \$400 to \$12,000, 65 percent of the householders had been employed in trade and transportation, labor, and manufacturing fields. Again those householders that recorded no employment accounted for significant results (14 percent). A characteristic closely related to home value is that of home debt or mortgage.⁶³

Mortgages ranged from owing nothing to \$8000. By far the largest percentage of the householders, more than two-thirds, owned their home without a mortgage. It is apparent from a comparison of occupational categories and mortgage

values, householders involved in labor, manufacturing, trade and transportation, and those listing no employment owned a majority of the debt-free homes in 1925. The remaining 31 percent of the householders held an average debt of \$385 on their dwellings and property. The occurrence of higher mortgages, those values between \$1000 and \$8000, were held mostly by householders employed within agricultural, domestic service, and professional occupations.⁶⁴ This is understandable when taking into consideration the number of farmers who advertised the sale of their property.

Census data indicated that 226 families rented their dwellings. Of this total, 50 percent paid less than sixteen dollars per month for rent. However, rents ranged from two dollars to seventy-five dollars per month, placing the average monthly rent during 1925 at nineteen dollars. Rents between ten dollars and thirty dollars per month were common. Of those householders who rented their dwellings, 76 percent were employed in labor, manufacturing, and trade and transportation.⁶⁵

In summary, the 1925 census data for Belle Plaine indicated that the community contained a high percentage of native-born householders. A community with 85 percent of the householders born in the United States in 1925, as well as the implementation of federal immigration quotas in 1921, the move toward a native-born society had been inevitable.

However, relying on census data entirely does not present a concise picture of Belle Plaine in 1925, hence other sources are necessary to complete this picture.

In addition to the data recorded from the census, it is important to review other primary sources to acquire a clearer picture of the characteristics and happenings of a community. The Belle Plaine Union, City Council's minutes for 1925, and the 1918 Belle Plaine Municipal Code aid in recognizing advances taken by Belle Plaine in the early twentieth century. These sources assist in recognizing important events and happenings as they unfold in the rural Iowa community.

The Belle Plaine Union, published weekly during 1925, fluctuating between one and two sections per issue. The newspaper reported on local, state, national, and international events, as well as provided the reader with items of human and local interest. Information about other places/countries appeared in each issue, along with house or building floor plans, classified advertisements, and sporting events and news. Each issue included information concerning those residents traveling or visiting. Round trip fares for travel to Chicago, Kansas City, St. Louis, or California and Wyoming appeared in The Belle Plaine Union.⁶⁶ A comic page appeared in each issue until May 21, 1925, at which time it

was discontinued. The paper, however continued to print a small comic on the front page of each issue.

The Belle Plaine Union published advertisements for professionals, stores, and markets, announcements of those visiting and traveling, as well as announcements for meetings of associations, churches, clubs, and organizations in Belle Plaine. Those professionals who provided health and dental care, law services, veterinary care, plumbing, and auctions advertised in The Belle Plaine Union.

The Belle Plaine Union also carried advertisements for many local businesses. In 1925, these advertisements included sales notices for stores (hardware, grocery, furniture, and clothing) and automobiles. Each issue contained advertisements for the local grocery, hardware, and clothing stores, in which it became apparent that each attempted to better the other. Advertisements in the newspaper indicated that Belle Plaine supported at least seven different groceries in 1925. The following is a sample of some grocery products available in Belle Plaine.

Beans, 3 pounds
Coffee, Peaberry brand
Corn Flakes
Fruits, canned

Pork & Beans, Heinz brand
Sugar, 10 pounds
Syrup, Karo brand
Vegetables, canned

The grocery advertisements indicated that Belle Plaine housewives found it possible to complete their shopping

within their own self-contained community.

Automobile advertisements were aimed at specific audiences as well. Advertisements promoting the truck, family or touring car, and the car that was "easy to drive" (meant for a lady) appeared in most issues. However, along with an automobile purchase brought new responsibility and concern. Traffic increased, and as most roads had not been built to handle such an increase, problems occurred. Reacting to the increased number of accidents and fatalities in the area around Belle Plaine, The Belle Plaine Union printed the cartoon shown in Figure 1.

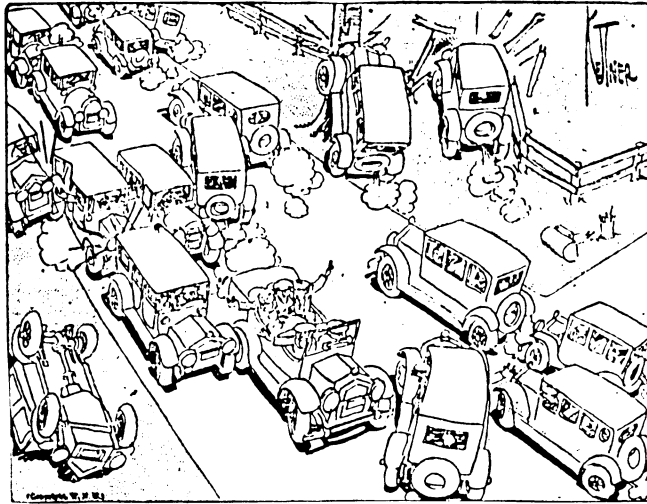


Figure 1. The Belle Plaine Union, June 11, 1925.

Seemingly high numbers of Belle Plaine residents travelled each week, made possible by the railroad and the increased use of automobiles. In 1916 Iowa had more automobile registrations per capita than any other state in the nation.⁶⁷ Reviewing the "Delinquent Automobile Tax List", printed in The Belle Plaine Union May 7, 1925, it became evident that cars had been purchased by many throughout Benton County, and throughout Iowa. The majority on this list, cars, trucks, and motorcycles purchased between 1917 and 1924, confirmed that no fewer than twenty different companies produced automobiles and trucks during this time. In the early twentieth century, many individuals set up factories in Iowa to manufacture automobiles. The industry thrived on numerous competition during the early twentieth century.⁶⁸

In the nineteenth century, Iowa society had been dominated by the "horse culture." Richard Lingeman, in Small Town America: A Narrative History, 1620 to the Present, described the "horse culture" before America ushered in the automobile. The farmer utilized the horse for travel as well as farming. The horse and wagon had been used to transport crops and livestock to the nearest railroad or market. By supporting the blacksmith, harness maker, liveryman, and wagon maker, the horse culture became an important and necessary part of nineteenth century life.⁶⁹

By 1925, the horse traveler had disappeared. In Belle Plaine, the building that earlier housed the community livery stable, had become a filling station and car repair garage.⁷⁰ As indicated by the 1927 Sanborn Fire Insurance map, Belle Plaine contained eight auto repair shops and three filling stations. The automobile had clearly taken over. Not unique to Belle Plaine, most Iowan communities experienced similar situations with the arrival of the automobile. It no longer became necessary to live within a certain distance from the county seat, or railroad. The automobile made it possible to shorten travel times, as well as provide comfort along the way. In addition, the "golden age of agriculture" allowed Iowa farmers to purchase one-half of all new automobiles in Iowa in 1910.⁷¹

In addition to business advertisements, newspapers announced upcoming meetings of various associations, clubs, and churches. By 1925, residents of Belle Plaine, like residents in most communities in Iowa, had a full social agenda. Lewis Atherton in his book, Main Street on the Middle Border, has written that around 1900, social fragmentation began to appear in midwestern communities. At that time, small town residents began to "participate in a national trend toward organizational activities." This trend continued and, described by Atherton, became the "twentieth century cult of joining." Atherton believes this change

took place because as towns grew in size, residents no longer identified with the total community. People then began joining many different organizations in an effort to give themselves a sense of belonging. In effect, Americans became a nation of joiners. Residents of Belle Plaine were no exception as associations, churches, clubs, and other organizations enjoyed high enrollments.⁷² The following is a small representation of these groups:

| | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Chapter EI of PEO Sisterhood | Alsew Club |
| Excellsior Kensington Club | Athena Club |
| Ladies Cemetery Association | Bridge Club |
| Linger Longer Club | Clover Club |
| Masonic Lodges | C & NW Club |
| Hope Lodge | Delphian Club |
| Mt. Horeb | Emanon Club |
| Knights of Pythias | Home Art Club |
| Order of the Eastern Star | Idylwild Club |
| Morning Star chapter | Portia Club |
| Pocahontas & Redmen | Rotary |
| Richardson Art Embroidery Club | Royal Neighbors |
| Sincere Rebekah Lodge | Sorosis Club |
| Silver Chain Club | Sunnyside Club |
| South Side Bucilla Club | Whist Club ⁷³ |

By meeting once a week, these groups enabled their members to continue to enjoy life while living in a time of agricultural and economic recession. Oyster suppers, box socials, ice cream socials, quilting bees, and food sales were held on a regular basis. Many of the Belle Plaine churches had ladies aid groups or associations.⁷⁴

In addition to the diversions that these groups

provided, other forms of entertainment and cultural performances contributed to life in Belle Plaine. Movies were shown each week, featuring the stars of the 1920s, at Belle Plaine's own theater. Popular movies included "The Great Divide," "So Big," "Seven Chances," "The Ten Commandments," and many Zane Grey westerns. "The Great Divide," billed as "the famous romance of the west," played in Belle Plaine. In the November 19, 1925 issue of The Belle Plaine Union, advertisements began for two movie theaters within the community.⁷⁵ Movies provided the people of Belle Plaine with an escape from the daily routine of economic recession. With the opening of a second movie theater one might assume that movies had become a popular form of entertainment in the community.

The Belle Plaine Union advertised other forms of entertainment as well. The "Belle Plaine Lyceum Course, Season 1925-1926" featured traveling comedic, dramatic, and musical productions. With season tickets at two dollars for adults and one dollar for students, it is possible that many in the community could afford these performances by traveling groups. Although attendance figures are not available, it is probable that many residents in the community attended at least one performance.

The Chautauqua took place in Belle Plaine each year as well. Described by Thomas Morain in Prairie Grass Roots, as

educational, inspirational, and uplifting, early Chautauqua programs included sermons, Bible instruction, and lectures. Starting in New York state in 1874, Chautauquas had traveled west to Iowa by the early 1900s. Popular throughout Iowa, chautauqua organizations raised money to bring the programs to their communities. Social changes in the 1920s brought about a change in the type of programs presented to communities. While early programs had not included humorous portions, during the 1920s chautauquas shifted to programs of pure entertainment. Even with a change in the type of programs presented, Chautauquas could not overpower the strength of the movie or radio, and by the 1930s ceased to exist.⁷⁶

The Belle Plaine Chautauqua, sponsored by businesses, private individuals, and professionals, ran for five days in July 1925. Offering the program free-of-charge, and extending it for five days, allowed the town management to combine this program with their annual Fourth of July celebration. Billed as the first free Chautauqua, the 1925 event promised the residents of Belle Plaine as much, if not more, than previous years.⁷⁷

The Belle Plaine Union, however, did not print only listings of entertainment and fun, but also published information concerning the community's finances. Each year the newspaper published the community's school district

budget. The budget included salaries of each teacher in the Belle Plaine community district. However, with only one householder employed in education in the community (school principal), it is difficult to determine if all teachers lived in Belle Plaine. Single teachers may have boarded with a family or lived with their own family, while others may have lived in nearby communities.

The Belle Plaine school district employed thirty-eight men and women as teachers in 1924-25. The July 9th issue of The Belle Plaine Union published the teachers' salaries. Comparison of the four male teachers and the thirty-four female teachers indicated that male teachers representing only 10.5 percent of the total group received 21 percent of the money. The average male teacher salary was \$2,225 while that for the female teacher was \$993. Other Iowa communities, such as Jefferson, also paid their teachers with two different pay scales. School districts saw the justification in this measure as they assumed that men had families to support and more expenses than their female counterparts. As women careers ended once they married, it was assumed that as single women their expenses were less than male teachers.⁷⁸

The City Council minutes also provided an excellent source of information in Belle Plaine that is not present in the census or newspaper. These minutes allowed a glimpse at

a rural community's government and how it operated. The Council consisted of the mayor, city clerk, and five councilmen, who met every two weeks and settled issues that were brought in front of the Council.

The City Council minutes for 1925 and resolutions passed by the Council allow a detailed look at the salaries received by various members of the municipal government.

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| City Clerk | \$115/month |
| Deputy Marshall | 115 |
| Police Chief | 100 |
| Street Commissioner | 110 |
| Supt. of Water | 115 |
| City Treasurer | \$ 25/year |
| Councilmen (5) | 25/6 months |
| Engine Keeper | 100 |
| Fire Chief | 100 ⁷⁹ |

It is apparent from inclusion of both a Fire Chief and Engine Keeper that the residents of Belle Plaine and its city officials continued to support fire protection. As a result of disastrous fires in the summer of 1894, it is understandable that the community would request reliable coverage and a professional squad. In the City Council minutes, the chief reported that during the period, April 1924 to April 1925, the Belle Plaine Fire Department responded to twenty-nine fires. Although property loss had not been severe (\$4,070), the fire department had been equipped to handle the situations.⁸⁰ It is apparent that

Belle Plaine's investment in fire protection proved beneficial to the community in the twentieth century.

Other issues had also been addressed during council meetings. The minutes indicated that street paving and lighting, fire and street equipment, "dog disposal," tax increase or decrease, business permits, and snow removal all demanded the council's attention. Although most concerns were routine, an issue on June 23rd deserves mention, indicating that not all residents of Belle Plaine lived at a same level of "modernness." At least one family did not live in a dwelling with indoor plumbing. Wasil Evenoff was asked by the Council to "clean and disinfect his privy within seven days" of the meeting, and also to connect his dwelling with the city sewer system within thirty days.⁸¹ Although this is the only mention of such an incident in 1925, one wonders how many householders had been in the same position as Evenoff in 1925.

Other Iowa communities had also seen the need for the establishment of municipal services in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Public water and sewage systems, as well as fire departments had been put forth by municipal governments during the period. Iowa law allowed for cities of the "second class" to organize volunteer firemen companies. Equipment, purchased by city councils and private fund-raising efforts, allowed these squads of

volunteer men to be prepared in the event of a fire.⁸² The presence of a fire department in Belle Plaine has been documented with requests before the city council for equipment, supplies, and man power.

The municipal code for Belle Plaine, revised in 1918 from the 1888 version, contained sixty-eight new ordinances. It is interesting to note the number of ordinances that dealt with misdemeanor crimes. Throwing missiles, swearing and cursing, annoying women, and spitting on the sidewalk could produce a misdemeanor charge and fine. Additional measures had been established to place restraints on traveling and community businesses. Many permits, fines, and licenses were left to the discretion of the mayor.⁸³

Many people from different states and countries had settled in Belle Plaine by 1925. With citizens representing most states of the Union and many European countries, Belle Plaine appeared to have been a microcosm of society. Native-born householders, the majority of whom had been born in Iowa, dominated the society in 1925; however, other areas of the country were also represented. Strong Protestant values followed early New England and eastern settlers to Belle Plaine, as well as the influence of southern-born settlers to the community.

CONCLUSIONS

Had Belle Plaine become a distinctive community within Iowa during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Comparison of its characteristics has led to a conclusion that as a whole Belle Plaine was similar to other Iowa communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; however, many distinctive features have been noted within the community between 1895 and 1925.

The thirty years covered by this study represent many successes and hardships for the community of Belle Plaine, Iowa. The community survived severe fires in the 1890s; enjoyed prosperity during the "golden years" of the early twentieth century; and faced economic problems in the 1920s. Those living in major agricultural regions achieved prosperity during the period from 1909-1914. This level of prosperity gave the Iowa (and Midwest) farmer purchasing power on par with the rest of the nation. Farmers purchased material goods in a manner similar to their urban neighbors. Belle Plaine residents experienced this time of growth and spending as well.

These good times, however, did not last. Many farmers found it necessary to cut back as agricultural prices plummeted following World War I. Many Belle Plaine

householders sold their businesses, farms, and property during the 1920s, hoping to survive the agricultural recession that gripped the midsection of the United States. The Belle Plaine Union advertised many moving and selling-out sales in 1925. In contrast, the 1890s newspapers did not contain these notices.

In 1895, Belle Plaine's newspaper editors were positive in their comments, and spoke of rebuilding the community following the devastating fires. The newspapers reported on local events and news, as well as information and advertisements concerning health, home, and life. By comparing the newspapers' contents, it seems that Belle Plaine residents had been able to survive economic panic and natural disasters in the 1890s, but found it difficult to survive the economic devastation they experienced in the 1920s.

Changes within a population or community may be tracked through recognized shifts in immigration, occupation, and religion. Many different peoples had settled in Belle Plaine by 1925; however, did Belle Plaine really change between 1895 and 1925? Native-born householders followed a westward pattern of movement across the country. While native-born householders accounted for 75 percent of Belle Plaine's residents in 1895, less than a quarter had been born in Iowa.

These nineteenth century householders moved from eastern states and made their way west. Among the many midwestern and northern tier states that the householders had travelled from, Illinois, Indiana, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania accounted for 42 percent of the householder population in 1895.⁸⁴

By 1925, native-born householders accounted for 85 percent in Belle Plaine. Immigration declines and the passage of the immigrant's native-born child to adulthood expedited this "native-born trend." Among the native-born householders, however, greater diversity had been recorded, in particular, the birthplaces of Belle Plaine householders. No longer from just the Middle West and Northeast, the 1925 householder had arrived in Belle Plaine from the East, North, South, and West. Additional states such as Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Texas, Utah, Washington were presented in the 1925 survey.⁸⁵

In this manner, the 1925 sample for householders' birthplaces exhibited much greater diversity than the 1895 sample (see Table 7). Within the foreign-born householder population diversity had also been recorded in the 1925 sample. While greater diversity existed in the 1925 sample, the majority of foreign-born householders had still arrived in Belle Plaine from Bohemia, Germany, and Ireland.

Table 7. Householder Birthplaces

| Birthplaces | Percent 1895 | Percent 1925 |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Native-born | | |
| Iowa | 21 | 59 |
| Illinois | 8 | 6 |
| Ohio | 13 | 4 |
| New York | 10 | 2 |
| Pennsylvania | 8 | 2 |
| Indiana | 3 | 2 |
| Remainder ^a | 12 | 10 |
| Foreign-born | | |
| Bohemia/Czechoslovakia | 10 | 6 |
| German | 7 | 5 |
| Irish | 3 | 1 |
| Remainder ^b | 5 | 3 |

Source: Iowa, Census of Iowa, 1895 and 1925, Manuscript Population Schedules for Belle Plaine, Benton County.

^aIn 1895, the "Remainder" group represented householders born in the following states: California, Connecticut, Dakota, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. In 1925 the list expanded to include householders born in Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Montana, Texas, Utah, and Washington.

^bThe "Remainder" group, in 1895, represented those foreign-born householders born in: Austria, Canada, Denmark, England, France, Scotland, Sweden, and Switzerland. In 1925 that list expanded to include: Belgium, Greece, Norway, Poland, and Russia.

The foreign-born group, although accounting for only 25 percent of the population in 1895, had been heavily represented by a few ethnic groups. The Irish, German, and Bohemian groups accounted for 20 percent of the total householder population in 1895. This pattern is repeated in

1925. With only 15 percent of the 1925 population foreign-born, 12 percent had come from Bohemia, Germany, and Ireland.⁸⁶

To compare occupations present in Belle Plaine in 1895 and 1925, required that 1895 occupations be placed into the 1925 occupational categories. Working from the 1923 city directory, positions were grouped into a given category. Once complete, this model was used to place the 1895 occupational data into the same categories (see Table 8). The occupational categories assisted in comparison of occupation with birthplace as well as an overall occupational trend within the community during the thirty years.

Table 8. Householder Occupations

| Category | Percent 1895 | Percent 1925 |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Agriculture | 9 | 8 |
| Domestic Service | - | 7 |
| Labor | 24 | 22 |
| Manufacture | 11 | 15 |
| Profession | 5 | 6 |
| Trade/Transportation | 29 | 30 |
| Unknown | 22 | 12 |

Source: Iowa, Census of Iowa, 1895 and 1925, Manuscript Population Schedules for Belle Plaine, Benton County.

Bohemian immigrants to Belle Plaine found employment in labor, trade and transportation positions. Within these categories, their employment included day, farm, and railroad laborers, businessmen, and retired persons. Between 1895 and 1925, a slight shift in their occupations occurred. In 1895, 55 percent of the Bohemian population worked as laborers; by 1925 that number had decreased to 30 percent. In 1925 the emphasis had shifted from labor to those reporting no occupation. The high occurrence of those reporting no employment in 1925, accounted for the number of Bohemians who had retired from the work force.⁸⁷

Germans were involved in many of Belle Plaine's businesses and professions. German householders in 1895 worked in agricultural, labor, and trade and transportation positions. Many householders, as early as 1895, recorded no employment. In 1925, however, a shift is recognized among the German householders still present in the work force. Householders worked in agriculture, labor, manufacturing, and unknown employment situations in 1925. However, the highest percentage of German immigrant householders had retired in 1925.⁸⁸

Within Belle Plaine, those of Irish background primarily worked as laborers, railroad workers, as well as those not listing employment. This pattern, existed in both 1895 and 1925; however, two Irish householders worked as

farmers in 1895.⁸⁹ As early as 1925, the pattern had seemingly been established that Belle Plaine was a retirement community for many householders and residents. The 1923 city directory listed many retired farmers and laborers residing in Belle Plaine during the 1920s. It is apparent that these householders did not choose to leave the community once they had retired, and in some cases, may have moved to Belle Plaine when they had retired from nearby farms. Many residents who retired in Belle Plaine, did so in a manner that had become comfortable for them.

Only two categories, domestic service and "unknown" (including women in 1895 and householders who listed no employment in 1925), contained a significant increase or decrease. However, it is debateable as to the significance of these data as the two categories are related. In 1895, the category of "unknown" had been influenced by the presence of female householders within the sample. In 1925, the Iowa census began the practice of placing women householders in the category of "Domestic Service." This occurred only if the woman householder remained in the home; if actively employed outside the home, her occupation had been recorded.

In 1895, women's employment, while not recorded in the census, possibly included employment as teachers, seamstresses, milliners, domestic help, clerk, and keeping a boarding house or renting rooms. By 1925, 10 percent of

Belle Plaine's women householders sought employment outside of the home. While these householders may have been employed in the same positions as in 1895, the 1925 census provided the documentation to this. However, no distinction was made for those women who remained in the home, and either cared for their own family or rented rooms to boarders. This trend is recognizable in the state census for most Iowa communities in 1925. Thomas Morain stated that the same practice had been followed in the Iowa manuscript census for Jefferson in Greene County.⁹⁰

Occupations in Belle Plaine, during the thirty years of this study, had a major impact on daily life. Many changes occurred related to occupations from 1895 to 1925. The major change concerned the scope and direction of occupations and positions in the community. Utilizing the 1923 city directory to gather information of actual positions, it became evident that craftsmen had almost disappeared from the community by the 1920s. Many businesses and occupations had left Belle Plaine by the 1920s. While a grist mill had been present in the community during the 1890s, it had been replaced by a canning factory in the 1920s. Pre-fabricated and factory goods, mail order catalogs, and automobiles squeezed the rural community craftsman out of business. It no longer became necessary to employ someone to build a cabinet or wagon, or make a broom, as those items could be

purchased in stores or sent through mail order.

Household size was examined in relation to immigrant and agricultural families. Household trends were examined to determine whether immigrant families' households were larger than native-born households; and if the households of agricultural families were again larger than other households. The basis of comparison became the number of foreign-born and agricultural householders in the population, as well as the size of Belle Plaine's households in 1895 and 1925 (see Tables 9 and 10).

Table 9. Household Size, Foreign-born

| Household Size | Percent foreign-born in 1895 | Percent foreign-born in 1925 |
|----------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| One | 26 | 30 |
| Two | 32 | 21 |
| Three | 23 | 9 |
| Four | 20 | 11 |
| Five | 22 | 12 |
| Six | 29 | 11 |
| Seven | 34 | 19 |
| Eight | 35 | 10 |
| Nine | 43 | 23 |
| Ten | 66 | 11 |
| Eleven | 50 | 33 |
| Twelve | n/a | 0 |
| Thirteen | n/a | 0 |
| Fourteen | 100 | n/a |
| Fifteen | 0 | n/a |
| Nineteen | 0 | n/a |
| Twenty-five | 0 | n/a |

Source: Iowa, Census of Iowa, 1895 and 1925, Manuscript Population Schedules for Belle Plaine, Benton County.

Table 10. Household Size, Agriculture

| Household Size | Percent Agriculture in 1895 | Percent Agriculture in 1925 |
|----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| One | 0 | 7 |
| Two | 8 | 9 |
| Three | 9 | 10 |
| Four | 10 | 7 |
| Five | 9 | 6 |
| Six | 9 | 6 |
| Seven | 4 | 7 |
| Eight | 15 | 10 |
| Nine | 0 | 15 |
| Ten | 17 | 11 |
| Eleven | 50 | 0 |
| Twelve | n/a | 0 |
| Thirteen | n/a | 0 |
| Fourteen | 0 | n/a |
| Fifteen | 100 | n/a |
| Nineteen | 0 | n/a |
| Twenty-five | 0 | n/a |

Source: Iowa, Census of Iowa, 1895 and 1925, Manuscript Population Schedules for Belle Plaine, Benton County.

Belle Plaine households contained between one and twenty-five persons in 1895, and between one and thirteen persons in 1925. Foreign-born householders numbered 25 and 15 percent in Belle Plaine during the years 1895 and 1925, respectively. In 1895, eight households contained more than ten persons. Of these, three were headed by a foreign-born householder. However, it is important to note that although the range of household size reached as high as twenty-five persons in 1895, a foreign-born householder did not head a household with more than fourteen persons. Foreign-born

householders accounted for 50 and 100 percent, respectively, of households containing eleven and fourteen persons.⁹¹

By 1925, household composition had changed slightly. The average size of Belle Plaine households had decreased from four and one-half to four persons. In addition, the range of household size had decreased as well, ranging from one to thirteen persons in 1925. In 1925, six households contained over ten persons; however, only one of these households was headed by a foreign-born individual. Of the households with one to ten persons, the foreign-born householder did not possess a majority in household size. In fact, in six cases the foreign-born's household size was less than their percentage of the population.⁹²

For the most part, in 1895, foreign-born householders headed large households in greater numbers than their percentage of the population. It is obvious from this evidence that the foreign-born did have larger households than native-born persons in 1895. In just three cases, those households with three, four, and five persons were the foreign-born population less than 25 percent. Most were between 30 and 60 percent of the population for each household size frequency. It is curious that by 1925, the reverse had occurred. In that year, the evidence points to foreign-born householders possessing smaller households than their native-born counterparts.⁹³

The examination of immigrants and household size showed that the size of foreign-born households changed considerably from 1895 to 1925; thus the examination of farming households would determine if those households followed similar trends. Farmers possessing large household sizes, has been a characteristic of the American agricultural community. A large household would benefit the farmer by giving him many hired hands. In 1895, the average household size numbered four and one-half persons, agricultural households accounted for only 9 percent of the total householder population. In 1925, those householders engaged in farming accounted for only 8 percent of the householder population. Thus, farming had not become a major occupation within Belle Plaine.⁹⁴

In 1895, the householders engaged in agriculture accounted for 9 percent. It is necessary to consider the occurrence of agricultural households in each size category. Agricultural households did not occur in households of one, nine, fourteen, nineteen, or twenty-five persons, however, the agricultural households within the other household sizes were, in almost all (except two and seven persons) occasions, greater than 9 percent of the size population.

In 1925, the average household size had decreased to four persons, with the largest household (thirteen persons) headed by an individual employed as a laborer. The largest agricultural household numbered ten persons. The highest

numbers of agricultural households occurred in the two, three, and four household size. However, as those involved in agricultural pursuits only accounted for 8 percent of the 1925 householder population, their share of household size was, for the most part, consistent with their share of the population. For those households with eight, nine, and ten person, those involved in agricultural accounted for 10, 15, and 11 percent of the total, respectively. In 1925, it appeared that farmers possessed slightly larger households than householders involved in other professions.⁹⁵

The religious composition of Belle Plaine changed considerably between 1895 and 1925. In 1895, Methodist Episcopalians and Congregationalists accounted for 54 percent of the total householders. Most of these householders were native-born individuals. This is understandable given the number of New Englanders and New Yorkers who moved west during the nineteenth century. Catholicism accounted for only 13 percent or 88 people in 1895. Of the 88 people who reported being Catholic, 72 were foreign-born householders. Among that group, Bohemians (59) and Irish (7) householders, were the most frequent.⁹⁶

By 1925, the religious composition of Belle Plaine had changed. In that year the majority religion recorded in the census was "Protestant." Accounting for less than 1 percent

of the householders in 1895, by 1925, the "Protestant" category numbered 31 percent of the householder population in Belle Plaine. This was the only religious listing to increase, or decrease, at such a rate. In at least one instance a householder declared himself to be Jewish in 1925, whereas in 1895 the same person listed his religion as Methodist Episcopalian. It is possible that this householder felt that the community would not be tolerant of a Jewish businessman and mayor in 1895.⁹⁷

The comparison of birthplaces, occupations, and religions allow conclusions to be drawn concerning social aspects of the community. Examination of maps will allow for conclusions to be made in a physical sense of Belle Plaine (see Map 1, 2, and 3 in Appendix). The single change that is clearly recognized from the 1895 map to the 1925 map is one of size. Many houses were added to the community during that time, emphasizing the increase of population during the early twentieth century. Additional homes and schools, as well as the establishment of a high school all point to the continuation and survival of a nineteenth century community to one of the twentieth century.

As the community grew, changes occurred, the least being new street names in 1918. Although most of the street names changed in 1918, it was not difficult to trace Belle Plaine's

streets from 1895 to 1925. The analysis of the community physically, allows a comparison to be made over time. Belle Plaine grew considerably during the thirty years of this study. While the business section remained constant, the residential neighborhoods radiated out from that area. The business area had remained constant due to restrictions on space. These restrictions were due to the presence of the railroad on its south and west sides, and topography on the east.

The railroad has dominated Belle Plaine since its incorporation. As the community's major employer in 1895, the railroad employed almost 20 percent of Belle Plaine's householders. Its presence was felt in most areas of the community. However, by 1925 the railroad appeared to have been displaced by the automobile. The presence of the automobile was felt in all aspects of daily life; the establishment of gas and service stations, car dealerships, as well as advertisements and cartoons in the local newspaper emphasized the automobile's domination over local life. However, while the railroad fell into the shadows, it had not been forgotten. The railroad still transported manufactured goods to Belle Plaine, as well as transporting products from Belle Plaine to distant markets. The enlargement of Belle Plaine's roundhouse and turnstile indicated that traffic on the railroad had increased.

Maps also allow conclusions to be made concerning the location of businesses and homes. While the business section did not change dramatically, many buildings did. Building blocks were completely reconstructed during the thirty years, thus replacing many small shops with larger stores and buildings. Although substantial areas of Belle Plaine in 1895 were still rebuilding following the fires in 1894, the major industries and businesses present in the community had been identified.

Belle Plaine during the time period of this study, 1895-1925 experienced many changes. However, as much as the community changed, it remained within the same framework set forth in the nineteenth century. Of all the characteristics of the community, a householder's birthplace remained the most stable. The population of native- and foreign-born householders did not change much from 1895 and 1925. Although the native-born group did increase, that is understandable as the immigrants' Iowa-born children aged and established households of their own. Other characteristics, however, did not remain as stable.

Occupations in Belle Plaine changed dramatically during the thirty years of this study. Predominantly a horse culture in the 1890s, by 1925 Belle Plaine had been taken over by the automobile and twentieth century materialism.

However, within the occupational categories set forth in the 1925 census, the overall scope of employment did not alter much within the time period of this study. The same was true of the religious affiliations within the community. Although specific religions may have acquired or lost members, the community remained as a Protestant stronghold.

ENDNOTES

1. Remley J. Glass, Iowa and Counties of Iowa, and something of their origin and histories (Mason City, IA: Klipto Loose Leaf Company, 1940), pp. 7-8.

2. Glass, Iowa and Counties, p. 11; Leland L. Sage, A History of Iowa (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1974), pp. 50-51.

3. Lewis Atherton, Main Street on the Middle Border (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966), p. 4.

4. A preliminary study, completed by this author, compared five rural Benton County townships from 1860-1880. The townships of Eden, Homer, Iowa, Kane, and Monroe were predominantly agricultural during the last half of the nineteenth century.

5. Jean N. Swailes and the Centennial Historical Committee, Belle Plaine, Iowa, 1862-1962 (Belle Plaine: Belle Plaine Century Corporation, 1962), p. 19.

6. Swailes, Belle Plaine, pp. 19-21.

7. Swailes, Belle Plaine, p. 50.

8. Swailes, Belle Plaine, p. 55.

9. Executive Council of the State of Iowa, Census of Iowa, for the year 1925 (Des Moines: State of Iowa, 1925), pp. 718-719, 942; and Executive Council of the State of Iowa, Census Returns, 1895 (Des Moines: State of Iowa, 1895), p. 265.

10. Census Returns, 1895, p. 265; and Census of Iowa, 1925, p. 942.

11. William E. Leuchtenburg, The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 100-103, 131, 180-183.

12. Leuchtenburg, The Perils, 101, 180-183.

13. Census of Iowa, 1925, p. 941-942.

14. Charles E. Hughes, comp., The Municipal Code of Belle Plaine, Iowa (Marshalltown: Marshall Printing Company, 1918), title 9.

15. Swailes, Belle Plaine, pp. 53-55.
16. Census Returns, 1895, p. 269.
17. Iowa, Census of Iowa, 1895, Manuscript Population Schedules for Belle Plaine, Benton County; Bureau of Census, Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970 ([Washington D.C.]: U.S. Bureau of Census, 1975), p. 55; The life expectancy statistic used here is for 1900, the source did not include figures for 1895.
18. Iowa, Census, 1895, Belle Plaine.
19. Iowa, Census, 1895, Belle Plaine.
20. Iowa, Census, 1895, Belle Plaine.
21. Iowa, Census, 1895, Belle Plaine.
22. Frederick C. Luebke, "Ethnic Group Settlement on the Great Plains," Western Historical Quarterly, 8 (October 1977): 415.
23. Hildegard Binder Johnson, "The Germans" in They Chose Minnesota, ed. June Drenning Holmquist (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), pp. 153-167.
24. C. Winston Chrislock, "The Czechs," in They Chose Minnesota, ed. June Drenning Holmquist (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), pp. 335-338.
25. Leland L. Sage, A History of Iowa (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1974), p. 173.
26. Iowa, Census, 1895, Belle Plaine.
27. Thomas Morain, Prairie Grass Roots: An Iowa Small Town in the Early Twentieth Century (Ames, Iowa State University Press, 1988), pp. 26-27.
28. Iowa, Census, 1895, Belle Plaine.
29. Morain, Prairie Grass, pp. 27-28, 56.
30. Iowa, Census, 1895, Belle Plaine.
31. Christie Dailey, "A Woman's Concern: Millinery in Central Iowa, 1870-1880," Journal of the West 21 (April 1982): 26-32.

32. Dailey, "A Woman's Concern," 30.
33. Iowa, Census, 1895, Belle Plaine; Sage, A History, pp. 203-204.
34. Iowa, Census, 1895, Belle Plaine.
35. The Lever, vol. 7, no. 45 (2/6/1895).
36. Morain, Prairie Grass, p. 27.
37. Atherton, Main Street, p. 222-223.
38. Every Other Daily Union, July 17, 1897, no. 1620. The paper stated that there were either fifty-eight, or sixty-eight (conflicting information), secret organizations in Belle Plaine. Even so, at that time there were still many social organizations present within Belle Plaine, helping to substantiate the idea of Midwestern "Boosterism." In the same issue seven church schedules were published. Those represented were the Baptist, Catholic, Congregational, Evangelical Association, Men's Union Prayer Meeting, Methodist Episcopal, and United Evangelical.
39. City Council Minutes for Belle Plaine Iowa, March 18, 1895, December 10, 1895. Salaries were resolved for the mayor, councilmen, and the treasurer. However, due to the script and quality of the paper, it is not possible to be completely accurate, although it is plausible that the following are indeed the salaries for the elected officials. Unfortunately the Minutes did not indicate any decimal in the figure nor did they indicate for length of time these figures were for.
- | | |
|------------|--------|
| Mayor | \$50 |
| Councilmen | 18 |
| | 23 |
| | 24 |
| | 26 |
| | 29 (2) |
| Treasurer | 49 |
| Attorney | 145 |
| Solicitor | 107 |
40. Minutes, March 18, 1895.
41. Richard Lingeman, Small Town America: A Narrative History 1620 to the Present (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1980), p. 297.

42. Maureen Ogle, "Redefining Public Water Supplies, 1870-1890: A Study of Three Iowa Cities," The Annals of Iowa 50 (Summer 1990): 511-516.

43. Ogle, "Redefining," 508-513.

44. Morain, Prairie Grass, pp. 116-117.

45. Iowa, Census of Iowa, 1925, Manuscript Population Schedules for Belle Plaine, Benton County.

46. Iowa, Census, 1925, Belle Plaine; Census of Iowa, 1925, 941.

47. Sage, A History, p. 173; Census of Iowa, 1925, pp. 718-719. It is difficult to determine the number of African-American families that may have settled permanently in Belle Plaine. However, there is strong evidence that many families may have settled in Belle Plaine in the years following 1925.

48. See Dorothy A. Schwieder, Elmer Schwieder, and Joseph Hraba, Buxton: Work and Racial Equality in a Coal Mining Community (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1987), for more information concerning Buxton, Iowa. Prior to its close in 1925, the Consolidation Coal Company operated a coal mine near Buxton, Iowa. A company town, Buxton ceased to exist after the Consolidation Coal Company closed the mine in 1925. Although the Company relocated within twenty miles of Buxton, only one-half of the families followed. The remainder were free to move as they wish. It is conceivable that many families may have travelled to Belle Plaine, via the spur line that ran between Belle Plaine and Buxton.

49. Iowa, Census, 1925, Belle Plaine.

50. Iowa, Census, 1925, Belle Plaine.

51. Sage, A History, p. 93.

52. Iowa, Census, 1925, Belle Plaine.

53. Iowa, Census, 1925, Belle Plaine.

54. Iowa, Census, 1925, Belle Plaine.

55. Morain, Prairie Grass, pp. 62-64.

56. Iowa, Census, 1925, Belle Plaine.

57. Iowa, Census, 1925, Belle Plaine.

58. While Protestantism increased 30 percent between 1895 and 1925, it is not clear if this increase represents an increase in Protestant religions as a whole.

59. Iowa, Census, 1925, Belle Plaine.

60. Carroll Engelhardt, "Compulsory Education in Iowa, 1872-1919," The Annals of Iowa 49 (Summer/Fall 1987): 63, 70-71.

61. Keach Johnson, "The State of Elementary and Secondary Education in Iowa in 1900," The Annals of Iowa 49 (Summer/Fall 1987): 29-37.

62. The figure of 74 percent did not take into account the number of missing values present in this category. In 1925 there were 35 cases where home ownership/renting was coded unknown in the absence of data for this category. Although it is probable that these 35 householders rented their dwellings, that assumption was not immediately made.

63. Iowa, Census, 1925, Belle Plaine.

64. Iowa, Census, 1925, Belle Plaine.

65. Iowa, Census, 1925, Belle Plaine.

66. The activities mentioned in this paragraph were printed in each issue of The Belle Plaine Union. Although the rates for each destination was not published in each issue, the fare for Chicago appeared in most issues.

67. Morain, Prairie Grass, p. 116.

68. Frederick Lewis Allen, The Big Change: American Transforms Itself, 1900-1950 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), pp. 116-117, 121; The Belle Plaine Union, May 7, 1925. The Delinquent automobile tax list is useful in determining the amount of cars and trucks that were present in the community and surrounding area during the 1920s. I was surprised that in the 1920s there had been so many automobile companies. The list follows:

| | | | |
|-----------|---------|---------------|------------|
| Auburn | Ford | Mitchell | Overland |
| Buick | Hudson | Moline-Knight | Packard |
| Chevrolet | Jeffrey | National | Saxon |
| Dodge | King | Oakland | Studebaker |
| Essex | Maxwell | Oldsmobile | Velie |

69. Lingeman, Small Town, pp. 262-265.

70. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1895 and 1927.
71. Morain, Prairie Grass, pp. 110-124.
72. Richard Lingeman, Small Town , pp. 406, 410; Dorothy Schwieder, "Rural Iowa in the 1920s: Conflict and Continuity," The Annals of Iowa, 47 (1983): 106.
73. This a representation of the various listings of associations, clubs, or organizations that The Belle Plaine Union printed during 1925. Although incomplete, this list represents a large group portion of the population. There appeared, in 1925, a club for every occasion.
74. The Belle Plaine Union listed varies meetings for the Bethany Ladies Aid, the Catholic ladies, and other church affiliations.
75. The Belle Plaine Union, March 12, 1925, April 30, 1925, August 20, 1925, November 19, 1925.
76. Morain, Prairie Grass, pp. 170-171.
77. The Belle Plaine Union, July 2, 1925, p. 1.
78. The Belle Plaine Union, July 9, 1925, p. 3; Morain, Prairie Grass, p. 65.
79. Belle Plaine City Council Minutes, March 24, 1925, April 14, 1925, October 13, 1925; and Resolutions, 44-441, # 156.
80. City Council minutes, April 6, 1925.
81. Belle Plaine City Council minutes, June 23, 1925.
82. Maureen Ogle, "Efficiency and System in Municipal Services: Fire Departments in Iowa, 1870-1890," The Annals of Iowa 50 (Spring 1991): 844-846.
83. Hughes, Municipal Code, title 9.
84. Iowa, Census, 1895, Belle Plaine.
85. Iowa, Census, 1925, Belle Plaine.
86. Iowa, Census, 1895 and 1925, Belle Plaine.
87. Iowa, Census, 1895 and 1925, Belle Plaine.

88. Iowa, Census, 1895 and 1925, Belle Plaine.
89. Iowa, Census, 1895 and 1925, Belle Plaine.
90. Morain, Prairie Grass, p. 56.
91. Iowa, Census, 1895 and 1925, Belle Plaine.
92. Iowa, Census, 1895 and 1925, Belle Plaine.
93. Iowa, Census, 1895 and 1925, Belle Plaine.
94. Iowa, Census, 1895 and 1925, Belle Plaine.
95. Iowa, Census, 1895 and 1925, Belle Plaine.
96. Iowa, Census, 1895, Belle Plaine.
97. Iowa, Census, 1895 and 1925, Belle Plaine.

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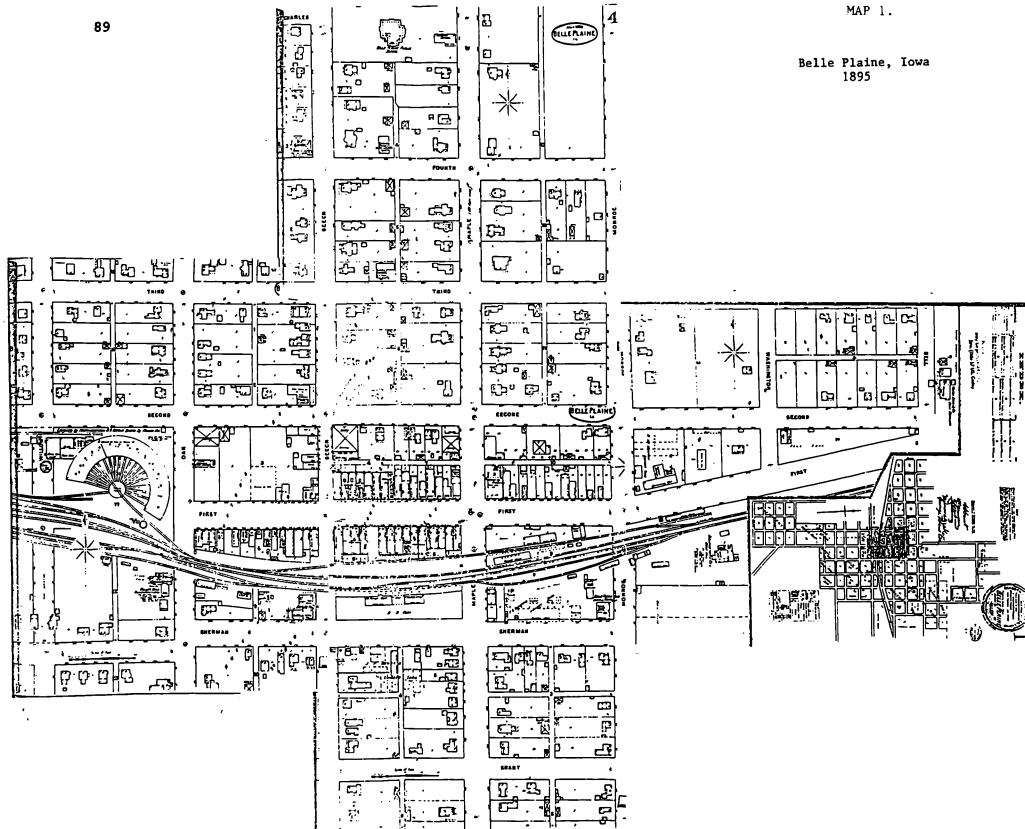
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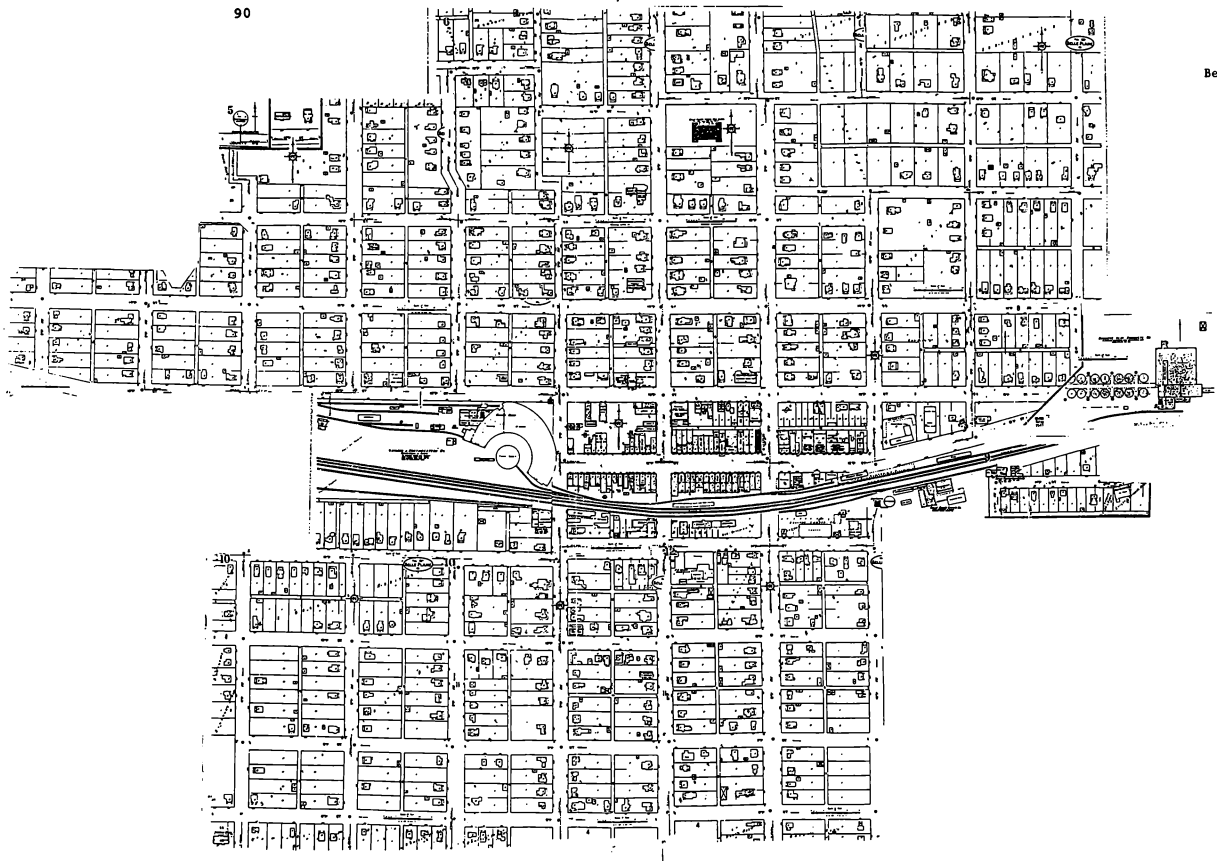
APPENDIX

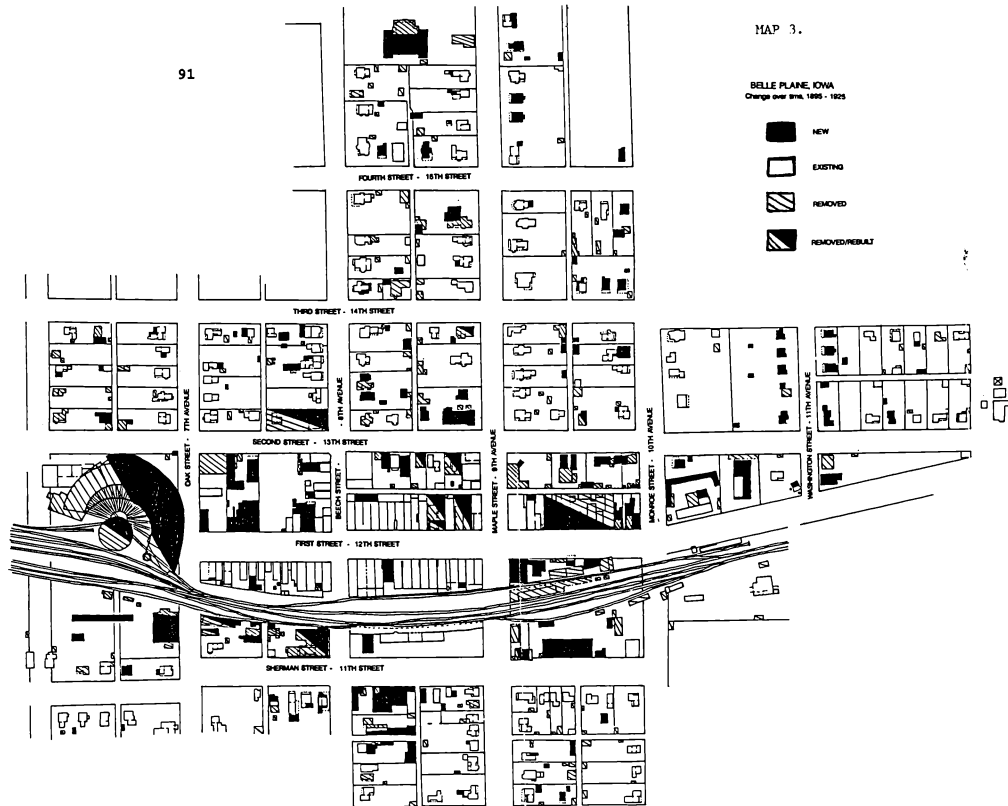
- MAP 1. Belle Plaine, Iowa, 1895
- MAP 2. Belle Plaine, Iowa, 1925
- MAP 3. Change over time, Belle Plaine, Iowa, 1895-1925

Belle Plaine, Iowa
1895



Belle Plaine, Iowa
1925





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